

Palmerton Zinc Site



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency · Region III · Superfund Fact Sheet · April 1998

EPA Completes Risk Assessment Study



The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently finalizing the Risk Assessment Study for Operable Unit 3 (Borough of Palmerton and surrounding area) for the Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site located in Carbon County, Pennsylvania. The study assesses the site contamination caused by operation of nearby zinc smelters and determines the risks posed to public health.

EPA prepared the risk assessment with valuable input from the Palmerton Environmental Task Force's (PETF) risk assessment subcommittee. Representatives from the Task Force, the Borough of Palmerton and two of the **potentially responsible parties (PRPs)** for the Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site — Horsehead Industries Inc. and Viacom International Inc. — served

Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs): The companies or people responsible for the contamination at a site. Whenever possible, through administrative and legal actions, EPA requires PRPs to clean up the hazardous waste sites they have contaminated.

as members of the risk assessment subcommittee and participated in the study process. EPA held a public meeting on February 25 at the Palmerton Library

so community members could ask questions about the risk assessment while it was in draft form.

According to the risk assessment, lead and arsenic are the contaminants that pose the greatest risks to the area. About half of the homes in Palmerton are expected to have lead levels in soil and/or dust of 650 milligrams/kilogram (mg/kg) or higher. These conditions may result in more than a five percent chance that children up to six years old would have **blood lead levels** greater than 10 micrograms/deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$).

Blood Lead Level: The amount of lead in blood. A blood lead level is measured in micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$). According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), blood lead levels as low as 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ are associated with harmful effects on children's learning and behavior.

EPA found elevated levels of arsenic in some Palmerton soils. Health risks due to arsenic alone are possible, but the risks due to lead are greater. In addition, most of the areas contaminated with arsenic are also contaminated with lead. Consequently, if these areas are cleaned of lead, they will simultaneously be cleaned of arsenic.

EPA expects to place the final Risk Assessment for Operable Unit 3 in the information repository by the end of this month. (Please see the back page for details on the information repository.) Once the risk assessment is finalized, EPA will begin a feasibility study which will identify and evaluate possible cleanup methods for the site, including their benefits, limitations and costs.

Removal Action Cleans Homes of Lead and Cadmium



Between 1994 and 1997, EPA conducted an interim removal action, cleaning over 200 homes in the Palmerton area. The goal of the program was to reduce very high levels of lead and cadmium in homes

with children up to six years old and pregnant women — the most vulnerable members of the community. EPA's cleanup actions were determined by where the contamination was and how much was present. For example, indoor contamination may have required carpet replacement or just a thorough cleaning. Outdoor contamination usually required some soil treatment and a grass cover to reduce exposure to contaminants in the soil.

Many Palmerton residents expressed interest in the home cleanup program. EPA responded first to those homes with the highest levels of contamination. If you are interested in learning more about the home cleanup program, please contact David Polish, EPA Community Involvement Coordinator, at (800) 553-2509.

Community Interviews Scheduled for April 30 - May 1

Later this month, EPA will interview Palmerton residents to hear their thoughts and concerns about the Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site. EPA will include a summary of these concerns in an updated community relations plan (CRP) for the site.

A CRP is a document that highlights a community's concerns about a site, outlines activities EPA will conduct to address these concerns, and fosters communication between EPA and the community. When the updated CRP is complete, EPA will place a copy in the local information repository. A copy of the current CRP for the Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site is on file at the Palmerton Library.



Residents Ask for Groundwater Subcommittee

Last year, some members of the Palmerton community expressed their concerns about monitoring wells that EPA planned to drill in order to test the site’s groundwater. These citizens were concerned that drilling these wells could possibly spread the contamination and hoped that instead, EPA could test existing wells. EPA is evaluating this option.

In response, EPA and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PaDEP) agreed to create a joint subcommittee to review options for testing the site’s groundwater. Members of the subcommittee include representatives from EPA; PaDEP; the PRPs; PETF; Palmerton Citizens for a Clean Environment (PCCE); the Pro-Palmerton Coalition and local, state and federal officials. The subcommittee met for the first time in November 1997. PaDEP will determine when the next meeting will be held and the agenda for the meeting.



For More Information...

For more information about the Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site, please contact one of the EPA representatives listed below:

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To Review the Site Records

Information about the Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site is also available for review in the Administrative Record File. The Administrative Record File is EPA’s official collection of documents, data, reports and other information that supports EPA’s decision on cleaning up a site. You may review the Administrative Record File at the information repository listed below:

Palmerton Library
402 Delaware Avenue
Palmerton, PA 18071
(610) 826-3424



Contact: Gerald Geiger, Director

Hours: 10 a.m. - 4:55 p.m.
Monday - Friday

7 p.m. - 9 p.m.
Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday

You also may review the file at the EPA Administrative Records Room at 841 Chestnut Building, Philadelphia, PA 19107. Please call (215) 566-3157 for an appointment.



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